

Network 17 CARES Hearing - South
Testimony of Thomas J. Stranova

Thank you for inviting me here today to testify on this exceptionally important VA initiative. The subject of my testimony today will be the CARES plans for the Valley-Coastal Bend and Southern VISN 17 CARES Markets.

I will first discuss the Valley-Coastal Bend Market. This market has VA staffed outpatient clinics in Corpus Christi, McAllen, and contract CBOC's in Alice, Kingsville, and Brownsville. There are no VA inpatient facilities in the market.

CARES Capacity Planning Initiatives for the Valley-Coastal Bend Market addresses deficits in primary, specialty, and mental health outpatient services as well as hospital care.

By 2022, the Valley-Coastal Bend Market primary care workload is expected to increase by 44%, and specialty care workload is expected to increase by 200% over current levels. Therefore, the Network 17 CARES plan proposes that the clinic in Corpus Christi be expanded, and the Brownsville clinic be replaced by a larger VA staffed clinic in Harlingen. In Harlingen, plans are underway to expand our existing affiliate partnership with the University of Texas at San Antonio Health Science Center to provide primary and specialty care. This partnership may also provide the basis for future inpatient capability. This expansion will meet outpatient service planning initiatives for the Valley-Coastal Bend Market.

The Valley-Coastal Bend Market also has an access planning initiative for hospital care.

The Network 17 CARES plan estimates that approximately 10 beds are needed in Corpus Christi and 10 beds in Harlingen. It is proposed that the inpatient needs be addressed by contracting for bed days of care in the Corpus Christi and Harlingen communities. This will resolve the access gap by bringing 90% of the veterans in the market within the access standard for hospital care.

It is expected that approximately 35% of bed days of care in the Valley-Coastal Bend Market for the complex specialty medical, surgical, and psychiatric care will continue to be provided by the San Antonio VAMC.

Moving on to the South Market. The South Market has facilities that provide both inpatient and outpatient services at the San Antonio and Kerrville Medical Centers, as well as at freestanding VA staffed clinics in San Antonio, Victoria and Laredo, and contracted clinics in Beeville, New Braunfels, and Uvalde.

Capacity planning initiatives for the South Market address deficiencies in primary, specialty, and mental health care.

Demand for primary care in the South market is expected to increase 21% over 2001 levels. The demand for specialty care is expected to increase 53% over the same period.

To address these gaps, Network 17 has proposed new clinics to be located in the greater San Antonio area. The capacity of these clinics will be sufficient to meet the projected demand for primary, specialty, and mental health outpatient services and includes service requirements for DOD beneficiaries in support of the national initiative for enhanced VA/DOD sharing.

Kerrville falls within the Small Facility category as defined by CARES, which requires an evaluation of the effectiveness of the acute medical beds at the facility. At present, the San Antonio VAMC is operating at capacity. To relocate the medical beds from Kerrville will require a major construction project that builds additional bed capacity at the San Antonio Medical Center. Contracting the medical beds out into the community was determined to be cost prohibitive.

I would like to now review modifications to our plan following the national review. These modifications are limited to changes in the status of medical beds at Kerrville.

During the national review Network 17 was requested to provide a plan for relocating, in the near term, inpatient medical beds from Kerrville to San Antonio. To accomplish this

plan a construction project for approximately 30 additional beds will be needed at San Antonio prior to the closing of the Kerrville medical beds.

In closing, I would like to again thank the commission for inviting me to be here today to share my thoughts on the CARES initiative.

I will be happy to address any questions that you might have.